

# LIST OF SNAKES TAKEN IN TRAVANCORE FROM 1888 TO 1895.

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Seven years ago I began collecting snakes systematically for the Trevandrum Museum, and, by the aid of friends in the hills, and my own and a native collector's exertions in the plains, have got together so far some sixty species. Of these, three are new to science and have been described by Mr. Boulenger in the pages of this journal, and have been, or will be, figured there also. They are *Rhinophis travancoricus*, *Rhinophis fergusonianus* and *Dipsas dightoni*, the latter named after Mr. Dighton of Pirmerd, to whose exertions and to those of Messrs. Richardson, Turner and Marshall I have been mostly indebted for specimens from Pirmerd, the High Range, and Ponnudi respectively. It is difficult to say much about the habits of the various species, for nearly all are nocturnal, and, when one does come across one in the day time, all one can do, as a rule, is to capture it without delay, so that it is not often one has the chance of watching snakes in their own haunts under natural conditions. The first snake I saw in this country was a few days after I landed. I was sitting in the verandah of a house in Madras when my attention was drawn to a frog, which had just hopped on to the road close by; in a second it was followed by a snake that seized it and at once commenced to swallow it. The friend, with whom I was staying, and I ran out and intently watched the performance, which proceeding appeared to cause the snake no anxiety, when suddenly there was a sound of wings, and snake and frog soared away in the grasp of a Pariah kite. Imbued as I was at that time with the common but erroneous notion that "cobras are found every day in your slippers," and other snakes to be met with at every turn, I was not at all surprised at the occurrence, but I have since learned to modify this opinion and have never again been present at such a veritable "chain of destruction." The fact is that unless you search for snakes, and that with diligence, you hardly come across a single stray one from year's end to year's end. To return to Travancore. There are eight species of *Silybura* recorded by Colonel Beddome (who, when at the head of the Forest Department in Madras,

did so much to extend the knowledge of these and other earth snakes) which should be found in Travancore. Of these we have secured six, and it is possible we may yet come across the other two, for these snakes are very local and are not easy to find at any time though, when one has been met with, others of the same species may generally be found near the same locality.

### Family TYPHLOPIDÆ.

These are small worm-like snakes, which are entirely subterranean in habit and can only be obtained by digging. In excavating a tank in the public gardens I got a number, but with a single exception all of one kind.

*Typhlops braminus*. Fairly common in Trevandrum.

*Typhlops porrectus*. { This has only been recorded from North  
India hitherto ; but a single specimen was  
brought to me and is now in the British  
Museum.

### Family BOIDÆ.

*Python molurus*.---This is a fairly common snake about the foot of the hills. Specimens are often brought in alive for the zoological collection in the public gardens (at present we have three, but none over ten feet). The largest I have heard of was one of eighteen feet killed on a coffee estate in the Ashambu hills.

On one occasion I was considerably startled by one. I was walking from one coffee estate to another, when I took a wrong road and coming to a stream I sat down and took my breakfast. Before retracing my steps I took a nap and suddenly woke to find a python gliding along within a yard of me. Needless to say I hurriedly departed in the opposite direction. One was killed not long ago near the regimental butts at Quilon, which are close to the sea ; it was about eight feet long and had killed a kid.

In captivity, as a rule, they feed well, but one we had fasted absolutely for a year and ten days. Contrary to what I have always believed, I find that they will eat a *dead* rat, or rabbit, just as readily as a live one. They make no attempt at constricting it but proceed to swallow it at once. At one time all the pythons that were kept in a particular cage died, and a *post mortem* examination showed that they

were infested with internal parasites in the form of round worms, which in most instances had perforated the intestines and the coating of the stomach.

#### Family UROPELTIDÆ.

These are burrowing snakes which feed upon worms. When cutting new roads on coffee, or tea estates, they are often met with. They may also be seen above ground after rain, when they follow the worms to the surface. Mr. Marshall told me that he found one one day struggling with a worm almost as large as itself. They are called by the natives "double-headed snakes."

*Rhinophis sanguineus*.—I have only taken one specimen at Ponmudi at about 2,000 feet elevation.

*Rhinophis travancoricus*.—Also a single specimen taken about six miles from Trevandrum. It was described by Mr. Boulenger in Vol. VII of this journal.

*Rhinophis fergusonianus*.—A single specimen taken by Mr. Sealy in the High Range ; also described by Mr. Boulenger.

*Silybura maculata*.—Five specimens have been sent to me from time to time from the High Range, and from that locality only.

*Silybura ocellata*.—As I have said above, all the *Silybura* are very local, and I received no specimens of this snake for some time till seven were sent to me in one consignment by Mr. Richardson from Pirmerd.

*Silybura rubrolineata*.—I have received this from localities from the foot of the hills to the High Range.

*Silybura myhendracæ*.—Five specimens of this snake have been taken, two of which were from the very foot of the hills, the other three from the hills of South Travancore. It has not been recorded from the High Range.

*Silybura madurensis*.—Five specimens, all from the hills of North Travancore at considerable elevations.

*Silybura brevis*.—This is by far the commonest of the earth snakes. I have taken it in the Pettah in Trevandrum, and it is found commonly in the hills at all elevations, both in North and South Travancore.

*Melanophidium punctatum*.—I have only received two specimens of this snake, both from Pirmerd. It is a most beautiful snake being highly iridescent.

*Platyplecturus sanguineus*.—This is only found at high elevations. I have it recorded from the High Range and Pirmerd.

### Family COLUBRIDÆ.

#### SERIES A.—AGLYPHA.

*Xylophis perroteti*.—One specimen from the High Range.

*Xylophis stenorhyncus*.—One specimen taken at Nedumangad, ten miles from Trevandrum, at the foot of the hills. Thirty years ago this place was well in the forest, but is now more or less open country.

*Lycodon travancoricus*.—This is a very common snake both in the low country and in the hills and is often found in bungalows. It is mistaken for *Bungarus cæruleus* sometimes, but may be readily distinguished from it by the absence of the hexagonal scales running along the centre of the back. It does not appear to live in captivity.

*Lycodon aulicus*.—Common in the low country, but I have not recorded a single specimen from the hills; like the above our captive specimens have only lived a short time.

*Dryocalamus nympha*.—Two specimens only received.

*Polyodontophis subpunctatus*.—A single specimen was brought to me alive taken in Trevandrum.

*Simotes arnensis*.—Two specimens taken in Trevandrum. One was brought alive, but did not survive long.

*Oligodon travancoricus*.—Several specimens of this snake have been sent to me from the High Range.

*Oligodon brevicaudata*.—A single specimen taken at Pirmerd.

*Oligodon subgriseus*.—This is a fairly common snake in the hills of both North and South Travancore, less so in the plains, but I have taken it in Trevandrum, and also have it recorded from Cottayam. I have kept it in captivity, but it does not thrive.

*Oligodon affinis*.—Two specimens, one from the High Range and the other from the foot of the hills.

*Zamenis mucosus*.—The rat-snake is one of the commonest snakes both in the hills and plains. Mr. Ingleby, the Superintendent of the Public Gardens, writes: "It is about the most active in confinement and next to the python thrives the best; its favourite food is a medium-sized frog, of which a fair-sized snake will eat about twenty-two at a meal. Confinement seems to retard their growth. They



also appear to prefer frogs to rats, possibly because the former are easier to catch. On seizing its prey it immediately begins to swallow it alive, and in a very short time a large number of frogs are disposed of. They are fed once a week. The oldest rat-snake in the Gardens has been in captivity for six years and was taken when quite young."

*Coluber helena*.—This is a common snake in the hills above a thousand feet elevation.

*Dendrophis grandoculis*.—A single snake of this species was sent to me from Pirmerd.

*Dendrophis pictus*.—A fairly common snake both in the hills and plains. Mr. Ingleby writes about those we have had in captivity: "It is a very lively and plucky snake, also a very pretty one when excited. It is very keen after frogs, particularly tree frogs."

*Dendrophis bifrenalis*.—Mr. Boulenger only records this from Ceylon; it is, however, not uncommon in Trevandrum.

*Dendrophis caudolineolatus*.—Like the last has been hitherto looked on as peculiar to Ceylon, but a single specimen was sent to me from Pirmerd.

*Tropidonotus beddomii*.—A fairly common snake throughout the hills above fifteen hundred feet elevation.

*Tropidonotus stolatus*.—Common both on the hills and in the plains. In captivity it is fond of lying in water.

*Tropidonotus piscator*.—This is essentially a water snake. It is common in the plains. On Pirmerd there is a peculiar variety having the markings quite different from those of the low country form. In the Public Gardens these snakes used to make a habit of coming into the cages of the water-fowl on the edge of the lake to purloin the fish and often were killed by the herons, but especially suffered at the beak of the hair-crested stork, which took a delight in watching for them.

*Tropidonotus plumbicolor*.—Fairly common both on the hills and in the plains.

*Helicops schistosus*.—Two specimens were taken in, or near, Trevandrum. One was brought alive and lived for some months in captivity; though its habits are said to be aquatic, I never saw it go into the chatty of water provided for it, nor did I ever see it "flattening and laterally expanding the skin of the anterior part of the body."

Mr. Ingleby writes : "This is a very fierce snake and does not appear to move about much in the day time. It invariably buried itself in the sand at the bottom of the cage with nothing but the extremity of its head and eyes sticking out. When provoked, it would turn to attack with great fierceness, though the specimen alluded to was not more than a foot long. Unfortunately when the cage was removed to another house it was attacked by ants (*Solenopsis geminata*) the first night and literally skeletonised. It appeared to be in a thriving condition, and might have lived for a considerable time if the ants had not got in. It was fed on small frogs, but was never actually seen in the act of eating though the frogs disappeared."

SERIES B.—OPISTHOGLYPHA.

*Dipsas trigonata*.—I have taken a few specimens in Trevandrum. It may be sometimes found at night among the branches of rose bushes. I have had it in captivity, but it does not thrive. It has a peculiar way of curling itself up in a ball round a thin branch.

*Dipsas ceylonensis*.—Several specimens of this snake have been sent to me from the hills both in North and South Travancore.

*Dipsas forstennii*.—A single specimen taken by Mr. Marshall near Ponmudi.

*Dipsas dightoni*.—This snake was described and named by Mr. Boulenger in a recent number of this Society's Journal. Three specimens have been taken on Pirmard. The type is in the British Museum.

*Dryophis dispar*.—Three specimens have been sent to me from the High Range.

*Dryophis mycterizans*.—A very common snake and the only one that the ordinary native is not afraid to handle. Boys often bring them in, having first taken the precaution to tie up the head in a bundle of rags. It does not thrive in captivity though it feeds well. One female brought to the Public Gardens on July 30th, 1891, gave birth to twelve young ones on September 27th. The young were about seventeen inches long; she did not live for any time. They were produced ovoviviparously.

Much interest has been excited lately over the fate of the python at the Zoological Gardens, London, that was swallowed by its companion.

I do not think that this is so uncommon an event as people imagine among snakes kept together in captivity. Two snakes will often seize the same frog, and when neither gives way one is pretty sure to be swallowed. We have had several instances among the snakes in the Public Gardens and have had to extricate them from their perilous position. On one occasion more than half the length of one of these snakes had disappeared down the throat of one of his companions, but it was pulled back by the head keeper none the worse for its engulfment.

*Chrysopelea ornata*.—A few specimens of this snake have been sent to me from the hills, and I have taken it about Trevandrum.

*Cerberus rhyncops*.—A single specimen was brought in by a fisherman. It was peculiar in having the scales in 27 rows, two more than usual.

#### SERIES C.—PROTEROGLYPHA.

*Callophis nigrescens*.—This is not a common snake and is only found at considerable elevations. I have received it only from the hills of North Travancore. All the specimens are under two feet long and are constant in coloration, namely, pale reddish-brown with five black longitudinal bands. I have never heard of any one being bitten by this snake.

*Bungarus caeruleus*.—I have taken several specimens in Trevandrum and have had several sent from the hills. The natives dread this snake very much. It will feed on other snakes readily, and on one occasion before I knew of this propensity, I put one in with it and in the morning it had disappeared. One was killed in the Public Gardens with the tail of a rat-snake, of almost its own size, hanging out of its mouth.

*Naia tripudians*.—Common in the hills and plains. Mr. Ingleby writes : "The cobra may be kept with fair success when once it adapts itself to feeding. The longest period which a cobra has been kept here is ten months, and the snake is still alive, and eats large bull frogs with avidity. They are naturally very fierce, and when put together often strike each other but without showing the slightest effect. Cobras, as also rat-snakes, commence to swallow their prey as soon as seized."

On one occasion two snake-charmers created a good deal of excitement in Trevandrum by producing cobras out of the mud walls of

every compound they went to. At last they went to the Police Office, where they soon captured a couple which were promptly impounded by the inspector, much against the wishes of the charmers, and were at once sent to me. I examined them and found that the fangs had been removed, thus showing that the charmers had by sleight of hand introduced the snakes, which they pretended were wild. Needless to say the men disappeared, in order probably to renew their stock-in-trade. One of the cobras I kept alive, the other I killed and displayed in the Museum with its mouth open, and a legend detailing how it came into my possession, as a warning to the credulous.

These snakes appear to prefer the larger kinds of frogs, especially large specimens of *Rana tigrina*. In captivity they take these with avidity, but are not attracted by the smaller kinds. They are capable of swallowing very large creatures proportionately to their own size. One was brought in that was about four feet long. At one part of its body it measured eight inches in circumference, the skin was much stretched and the scales widely separated. On cutting it open a water lizard (*Varanus bengalensis*), two feet long, was taken out whole.

*Naja bungarus*.—This is not a common snake, but may be met with at various elevations in the forest. I have it recorded from Ponnudi, Pirmerd, and from the foot of the hills. The largest specimen we have is eleven and a half feet long. The young ones are conspicuously banded. I have never heard of any one being attacked by this snake. On one occasion I rode over one which came suddenly out of the jungle and passed between my pony's legs.

*Enhydrius curtus*.—Of the sea snakes little can be said; they are brought in from time to time by the fishermen. Of this particular species we have three specimens.

*Hydrus platurus*.—Three specimens.

*Hydrophis torquatus*.—A single specimen.

*Enhydrina valakadien*.—Three specimens.

*Distira ornata*.—Two specimens.

*Distira stokesi*.—One specimen.

#### Family VIPERIDÆ.

*Vipera russellii*.—This is a common snake in the low country and very dangerous on account of its sluggish habits. It is fairly common



on the hills also. In confinement it does not appear to thrive. If disturbed, it swells its body and emits a very loud hissing. I have known several cases of dogs attracted by the sound attacking the snake and falling victims to their temerity.

*Ancistrodon hypnale*.—Not common and only found on the hills. Mr. A. F. Sanderson, who was bitten by one of these snakes in 1876, has given me the following account of the circumstance :—

“I had just gone to bed and was half asleep when, in turning over, I put my foot down on the blanket, which was folded up at the foot of the bed, and felt a prick on my little toe. I thought it might have been a pin, or thorn, and did not rise at once, but as it began to pain I got a light and found a small snake coiled upon the floor just below where the blanket had been ; so I got a stick and ‘jobbed’ him. Then I tied a handkerchief tight round my leg above the knee and drank as much strong brandy and water as I could. The pain continued all night so that I got no sleep, and the leg up to the knee was very much swollen and continued so for two or three days, during which time I could not put my foot to the ground. I forgot to say that, as soon as I knew it was a snake-bite, I made two cuts, crossing each other, on the wound and dropped a little carbolic acid into it. I sent the snake to Frank Bourdillon who sent it home and afterwards told me its name.”

Mr. Bourdillon when he left Travancore gave me his copy of “Theobald’s Reptiles of India,” in which he has noted marginally that it was this snake that bit Mr. Sanderson in September, 1876.

*Trimeresurus anamallensis*.—A common snake on the hills, variable in colour changing with the seasons, being quite light in the dry season and with faint markings, while in the wet it is dark and the markings are clearly defined.

Baron J. Von Rosenberg was once bitten by one of these snakes on the High Range. He has given me the following account :—

“I did not notice that I had been bitten. The men walking behind me said, ‘Hulloa ! that snake nearly bit you.’ I had shoes on at the time. I walked on ten miles and then sat out for an hour looking out for bison. I had felt no pain so far. On getting up I found I could not stand, and my foot swelled up so rapidly that I had to slice off the shoe. It was half as big as my head when I got back to

the bungalow by the help of three coolies. The marks of the fangs were distinct. I was in pain and feverish all night, and next morning a large cupfull of blood and matter came away. After two days I could put my foot to the ground, but it was several days before I could wear anything but a slipper. About a year after, the same place swelled up and there was pain and discharge for a few days. I saw the snake as it went away, a small green one. The marks of the fangs became very distinct as the swelling stretched the skin."

I met a hill man myself on one occasion, having the lower part of the right arm withered and useless, and he told me it was the result of a bite from this snake. As a rule this snake is only found at considerable elevations. But one was taken alive at the foot of the hills and lived in Trevandrum for some time.

*Trimeresurus macrolepis*.—Not uncommon on the hills from about two thousand feet elevation.

Since this paper was read before the Society, I have had another instance of one snake swallowing another brought to my notice but the affair ended unusually.

Mr. Ingleby writes: "Some frogs had been put in the glass case containing two rat-snakes, and while I was selecting from the rest, one of the snakes seized a fair-sized frog and apparently the other one must have got hold about the same time. A visitor shouted to me that one snake was swallowing the other, and just as I got to the cage the head of the one was just disappearing down the throat of the other. In about ten minutes' time, and with some difficulty, about one-third had disappeared, and then the snake rested, after a while he commenced again, and more than half had gone when a tremendous struggle took place; the snake inside appeared to twist himself round inside the other one; any way after a time the swallowing snake began to disgorge, first one or two inches, then he would stop and take it all in again, but finally the other got his tail around the water pot in the case and got some beverage, and before long out he came, frog and all, both alive."